

A SERMON FROM A RUSH NO. 651

**A SERMON
DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 24, 1865,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“Can the rush grow up without mire? can the flag grow without water?
While it is yet in his greenness, and not cut down, it withers before any other herb.
So are the paths of all, God; and the hypocrite’s hope shall perish.”
Job 8:11-13.*

ISAAC walked in the fields at eventide to meditate. I commend him for his *occupation*. Meditation is exceedingly profitable to the mind. If we talked less, read less, and meditated more, we should be wiser men. I commend him for the *season* which he chose for that occupation—at eventide. When the business of the day was over, and the general stillness of nature was in harmony with the quiet of his soul. I also commend him for the *place* which he selected—the wide expanse of nature—the field. Wise men can readily find a thousand subjects for contemplation abroad in the open country. Our four-square room is not very suggestive, but when a man walks in the fields, having the Lord in his heart, and his whole mental faculties directed towards heavenly things, all things aid him in his pleasing occupation.

If we look above to the sun, moon, and stars, all these remind us of the grandeur of God, and make us ask ourselves, “What is man, that the LORD should be mindful of him, or the son of man, that JEHOVAH should visit him?” If we look below, the green meadows, or golden cornfields all proclaim divine care and bounty. There is not a bird that sings, nor a grasshopper that chirps in the grass, which does not urge us to praise and magnify the name of the Most High—while the plants, from the hyssop on the wall to the cedar which spreads its branches so gloriously in Lebanon, exhibit to observant eyes the wisdom of the great Creator of all things. The murmuring brook talks to the listening ear in hallowed whispers of Him whose cloudy throne supplies its stream, and the air, as it sighs amid the trees, tells in mysterious accents of the great unseen, but ever-active Spirit of the living God.

The great book of nature only needs to be turned over by a reverent hand, and to be read by an attentive eye, to be found to be only second in teaching to the Book of Revelation. He who would have us forget to study the fair creation of God is foolish. He would have us neglect one book by a great author, in order that we may the better comprehend another from the same hand. The pages of inspiration reveal God far more clearly than the fields of creation, but having once obtained the light of God the Holy Spirit, we can then enter the world of nature, which has become consecrated to our best devotions, and find that “in his temple does every one speak of his glory.”

Down by the river’s brink let us go, like Pharaoh’s daughter, and perhaps among the rushes we shall find a subject for thought, of which we may say, as she did of Moses, “I drew it out of the water.” The flag, as it waves in yonder marsh, has a word of warning, and whosoever has ears to hear, let him hear.

I claim your attention for a preacher who is not often heard—lend him your ears, and when any shall ask you, “What went you out for to see?” you need not blush to answer, “A reed shaken by the wind.” The rush shall, this morning, by God’s grace, teach us a lesson of self-examination. Bildad, the Shuhite, points it out to us as the picture of a hypocrite—so, going to our work at once, we shall have three things to talk about this morning. The hypocrite’s religion—first, *what is it like?* Secondly, *what it lives on*, and thirdly, *what will become of it?*

I. First, then, THE HYPOCRITE’S PROFESSION—WHAT IS IT LIKE?

It is here compared to a rush growing in the marsh, and a flag flourishing in the water. This comparison has several points in it.

1. In the first place, hypocritical religion may be compared to the rush, for *the rapidity with which it grows*. True conversions are often very sudden—as, for example, the conversion of Saul on the road to Damascus, and the conversion of the Philippian jailer, when suddenly startled out of his sleep and made to cry, “What must I do to be saved?”

But the after-growth of Christians is not quite as rapid and uninterrupted—seasons of deep depression chill their joy, hours of furious temptation make a dreadful onslaught upon their quiet, they cannot always rejoice, their life is checkered, they are emptied from vessel to vessel, and are acquainted with grief. True Christians are very much like oaks, which take years to reach their maturity—many March winds blow through them before they are well-rooted, and oftentimes tempest, and flood, and drought, and hurricane exercise their tremendous powers upon them.

Not so the hypocrite—once having made a profession of being converted, things generally go very smoothly with him. “Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God.” They are strangers to lamentations over inbred corruption. When believers talk of a warfare within, they are astonished. If we groan out, “O wretched man that I am: who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” these people say, “What bad people these Christians must be, to talk in that way! What black hearts they must have! And how inconsistent for them to claim to be children of God!”

The hypocrite can always pray well and sing well. He meets no hindrances in coming to the mercy seat, has no groans to mingle with his formal songs. The backs of living men ache under their loads, but a steam-engine having no living sensibilities knows no pains, a horse may stumble from weariness, but a locomotive, never!

Even so, the mechanical professor goes on and on and on at an even rate, when living souls enjoy no such perfect equanimity. Strong temptations do not grieve the mere professor. The devil does not care to molest him, he knows he is sure of him, and so he lets him very much alone. The Pharisee’s house stood very firmly though it was built on sand, and it neither shook nor stirred till the flood came. It was as firm to all human appearance as if it had been founded on the Rock of Ages. When the trial-hour came, then the destruction was terribly complete. But meanwhile, its foundations were dug without labor, and its timbers were set up without trouble.

It is an ill sign, dear friend, if you never have to search your heart with deep anxiety lest you should be deceived. To have such strong faith that you never waver is one thing, but to be filled with such strong presumption that you never examine yourself is quite another. “Tush!” says this man, “I can do all things. I can run and not be weary. I can walk and not faint. I do not understand these sighings of Little-faith, and limpings of Ready-to-halt. I cannot understand all this noise about conflict within—I am peaceable and quiet always.”

Yes, so it may be. Alas! many have heard the voice, “Peace, peace, where there is no peace.” So, like the rush by the river, the hypocrite grows up suddenly and flourishingly in divine things, to all appearance, and finds it easy work to be green and fair in the ways of the Lord.

2. The rush is of all plants one of the most *hollow and unsubstantial*. It looks stout enough to be wielded as a staff, but he that leans upon it shall most certainly fall. It is a water-loving thing, and it partakes of the nature of that on which it feeds—it is unstable as water, and it does not excel. It has a fine appearance, but it is of no service whatever where stability is needed.

So is it with the hypocrite. He is fair enough on the outside, but there is no solid faith in Christ Jesus in him, no real repentance on account of sin, no vital union to Christ Jesus. He can pray, but not in secret, and the essence and soul of prayer he never knew. He has never wrestled with the angel, never sighed and cried unto God, and been “heard in that he feared.” He has a pretended confidence, but that confidence never was founded and bottomed on the finished work of Jesus Christ. He was never emptied of self, never brought down to feel that all his own doings, and willings, and powers are less than nothing and vanity. If there had been a deep repentance, and a real confidence, and a true life in Jesus, then he had not been the hypocrite that he now is.

Oh, dear friends, while I speak upon these things, I have over my spirit the overshadowing of a great gloom. What if some of us should be found to have been as unsubstantial as the rush by the river, when God comes to judge the world? What, when you need a hope to bear you up in the hour of death, what if it should snap beneath you? You high professors, you ancient members and revered church officers, you eloquent preachers of the Word—what if all your profession should, like the baseless fabric of a vision, pass away? You have been drinking of the cup of the Lord, you have been feasting at His sacramental table, you have talked a great deal of rich experiences, you have boasted of the graces which you think the Spirit of God has given you, but what if it should all be a delusion? What if you should have fostered in your soul self-deception, and should now be traversing the way of darkness, while you dream that you are in the way of light? May the Lord search us, and give us that true, solid, substantial, real, strong-hearted faith in Christ which will stand the test.

The reed is hollow and has no heart, and the hypocrite has none either, and want of heart is fatal indeed. When the Roman augur killed the victim to take an omen from the innards, he always considered it to be the worst sign of all if no heart was found, or if the heart was shriveled. "Their heart is divided," said Hosea, "now shall they be found wanting." God abhors the sacrifice where not the heart is found.

Sirs, if you cannot give God your hearts, do not mock Him with solemn sounds upon thoughtless tongues. If you do not mean your godliness, do not profess it. Above all things, abhor mere profession. Jonathan Edwards tells us that in the great revival in America there were conversions of all sorts of people, from harlots upwards, but not one single conversion, he said, of ungodly professors. Those seemed to have been the only persons upon whom the Spirit of God did not descend. Beware, then, of having the outward form of religion, and being hollow and heartless like the rush, for then your case is desperate indeed.

3. A third comparison very naturally suggests itself, namely, that the hypocrite is very like the rush for *its bending properties*. When the rough wind comes howling over the marsh, the rush has made up its mind that it will hold its place at all hazards, so if the wind blows from the north, he bends to the south, and the blast sweeps over him. And if the wind blows from the south, he bends to the north, and the gale has no effect upon him. Only grant the rush one thing, that he may keep his place, and he will cheerfully bow to all the rest.

The hypocrite will yield to good influences if he is in good society. "Oh yes, certainly, certainly, sing, pray, anything you like." With equal readiness he will yield to evil influences, if he happens to be in connection with them. "Oh, yes, sing a song, talk wantonness, run into gay society, attend the theater, take a turn with the dice. Certainly, if you wish it. 'When we are at Rome, we do as Rome does.'" Anything to oblige anybody is his motto. He is an omnivorous feeder, and like the swine, can eat the vegetable of propriety, or the flesh of iniquity.

One form of doctrine is preached to him—very well, he would not wish to contend against it for a moment. It is contradicted by the next preacher he hears—and really, there is a great deal to be said on the other side—so he holds with hare and hounds, too. He is all for heat when the weather is hot, and quite as much for cold when it is the season. He can freeze, and melt, and boil, all in an hour—just as he finds it pays best to be solid or liquid. If it be most respectable to call a thing black, well, then, it is black. If it will pay better to call it white, well, then, it is not so very black, in fact, it is rather white, or white altogether, if you like to call it so.

The gross example of the Vicar of Bray comes at once to one's mind, who had been a papist under Henry VIII, then a Protestant under a Protestant reign, then a papist under Mary, then again a Protestant under Elizabeth, and he declared he had always been consistent with his principle, for his principle was to continue the Vicar of Bray. Some there are who are evidently consistent in this particular, and in the idea that they will make things as easy for themselves as they can, and will get as much profit as they can, either by truth or error.

Do you not know some? They have not an atom of that stern stuff of which martyrs are made in the whole of their composition. They love that modern goddess, charity. When Diana went down, charity went up, and she is as detestable a goddess as ever Diana was. Give me a man who will be all things to all men to win souls, if it be not a matter of principle. But give me the man who, when it comes to be a matter of right and wrong, will rather die than deny his faith, who could burn, but could not for a moment conceal his sentiments, much less lay them aside until a more convenient season.

True godliness, such as will save the soul, must not be the mere bark, but the heart, the sap, the essence of a man's being—it must run right through and through, so that he cannot live without it. That religion is not worth picking up from a dunghill which you do not carry with you every day, and which is not the dearest objective for which you live. Beloved, we must be ready to die for Christ, or we shall have no joy in the fact that Christ died for us.

4. Yet again, the bulrush has been used in Scripture as a picture of a hypocrite, from its habit of *hanging down its head*. "Is it to hang your head like a bulrush?" asks the prophet, speaking to some who kept a hypocritical fast. Pretended Christians seem to think that to hang down the head is the very index of deep piety. To look piously miserable—to speak in a wretched tone of voice—to be constantly lamenting the wickedness of the times, and bewailing the badness of the harvests, and the wickedness of our legislature—to see nothing anywhere but what is vile, deceptive, and abominable, is thought to be the trademark of superfine godliness.

It is the mark of a hypocrite to wear always a sad countenance. Job says of the hypocrite, "Will he delight himself in the Almighty?" And the answer that he expected was, "No, it is altogether impossible!" A real hypocrite finds no satisfaction in his religion, he goes through with it because he thinks he must. He walks to his place of worship with his books under his arm just as a culprit might be supposed to walk up the gallows stairs, and when he gets to a place of worship, he is very proper in all his demeanor—very proper, indeed, but he is never joyous. Smile on Sundays! Shocking! What! Enjoy anything like mirth at any time! Awful!

Now, you understand all about this. There are some things which you must handle very tenderly, because they will break if you don't. A man, dressed in shoddy garments, walks very demurely for fear the rubbish should rend, but good broadcloth allows us liberty of action without fear of such an accident. Gingerbread religionists may only be looked at in their somber aspects, but genuine believers are not ashamed to be viewed even when their cheerfulness is at its full.

A person who has bought a pair of shoes made of brown paper must mincingly tread with delicate steps, but he, who according to Scripture, is shod with iron and brass may, with manly gait, march on and even leap for joy without fear. I love Christian precisioness of action, but I abhor hypocritical decorum and formalistic exactness of worship. I would advocate holy cheerfulness, a Christian freedom which lets the whole man show itself, a freedom of sorrowing when it is the time for sorrow, and a freedom of rejoicing when it is the time for rejoicing. That constrained, stiffly starched religion which some people think such a great deal of, is nothing but the bulrush religion of the hypocrite and the Pharisee, and the sooner we away with it the better.

The man whose heart is right with God does not stop always to be saying, "How will this look?" His heart tells him, as he reads the Word, that such a course is right, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he follows it. Right with him is delight. He knows that evil is not denied to him as though he were debarred from pleasure, but that it is only kept from him as a tender parent would keep poison from a child. Our life is the life of liberty, and we find of true religion, that "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."

5. Once more—the rush is well taken as an emblem of the mere professor from *its bearing no fruit*. Nobody would expect to find figs on a bulrush, or grapes of Eshcol on a reed. So it is with the hypocrite—he brings forth no fruit. The hypocrite gets as far as this—"I do *not* drink, I do *not* swear, I do *not* cheat, I do *not* lie, I do *not* break the Sabbath." His religion is all negative, but when it comes to anything positive, he fails.

What have you ever done for Christ? You may look at the whole of the hypocrite's life, and it yields nothing. Perhaps he has given a guinea or two to a charity. Yes—but did he give it *to God*? He has been kind to the poor. Did he look at the poor as being God's poor, and care for them because God cares for them? Did he do it for God? Throughout the whole life of the hypocrite, there is nothing in which he really serves God.

What! Not when he has made that long prayer? He did it either to satisfy his conscience, or to please those who were listening to him. Did he really pray to God and do it for God's glory, and in order that he might have fellowship with God? If so, he is no hypocrite, but the hypocrite proper, though he has left off many wrong things, yet he has not advanced so far as to bring forth fruit meet for repentance. He has not run in the way of holiness. He has not sought after the image of Christ. He does not delight in communion with Christ. He has no faith, no joy, no hope, no conformity to the spirit of the Master. He lacks fruit, and therefore he is as the rush, and not as a plant of the Lord's right hand planting.

I will not stay further to work out this parallel, only if any words have seemed to strike you, let them strike you. If there has been a sentence in what I have said that suited my own case, I do desire to feel its power. The worst is that some of you who are most sincere will be troubled when you search yourselves, when we do not want you to be, and others who are really hypocrites are the very last persons to think they are so.

When our young members come to me in such trouble, crying, "Sir, I am afraid I am a hypocrite," I always think, "I believe you are not, or else you would not be afraid of it." But those who are never afraid, who have just written it down as a matter of fact that all is well with them, should listen to the word of the prophet, "Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knows it not: yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knows not." The worm may be in the center of the apple, when the cheek of the fruit is still beautiful to look upon. God save us from hypocrisy, and grant us grace to see ourselves in a true light.

II. Secondly, we have to consider WHAT IT IS THAT THE HYPOCRITE'S RELIGION LIVES ON.

"Can the rush grow up without mire? can the flag grow without water?" The rush is entirely dependent upon the ooze in which it is planted. If there should come a season of drought, and the water should fail from the marsh, the rush would more speedily die than any other plant. "While it is yet in its greenness, and not cut down, it withers before any other herb." The Hebrew name for the rush signifies a plant that is always drinking, and so the rush lives perpetually by sucking and drinking in moisture. This is the case of the hypocrite. The hypocrite cannot live without something that shall foster his apparent piety. Let me show you some of this mire and water upon which the hypocrite lives.

Some people's religion cannot live without *excitement*—revival services, earnest preachers, and zealous prayer meetings keep them green, but the earnest minister dies, or goes to another part of the country, the church is not quite so earnest as it was, and what then? Where are your converts? Oh, how many there are who are hot-house plants—while the temperature is kept up to a certain point, they flourish and bring forth flowers, if not fruits. But take them out into the open air, give them one or two nights' frost of persecution, and where are they?

My dear hearers, beware of that godliness which depends upon excitement for its life. I do not speak against religious excitement—men get excited over politics, and science, and trade—why should they not be excited about the far weightier things of religion? But still, though you may indulge yourself with it sometimes, do not let it be your element. I am afraid that many churches have been revived and revived, till they have become like big bubbles full of wind, and now they have almost vanished into thin air.

The grace which man gives, man can take away. If your piety has sprung up like a mushroom, it will be about as frail. Doubtless many are converted at revivals who run well and hold out, and then their conversion is the work of the Spirit of God. But there are as many, I fear, of another kind, who get delirious with excitement, who fancy that they have repented, dream that they have believed, and then

imagine themselves to be the children of God, and go on in such a delusion perhaps year after year. Beware! Beware! Some hypocrites can no more live without excitement than the rush can live without water. But dear hearers, pray that you may be like the palm tree, which even in the desert, still continues green, and brings forth its fruit in the year of drought.

Many mere professors live upon *encouragement*. You are the child of godly parents—those parents naturally look with great delight upon the first signs of grace in you, and they encourage and foster, as they should do, everything that is good. Or you belong to a class such as some of those most blessed classes which meet here, presided over by tender, loving spirits, and whenever you have a little difficulty, you can run to these kind helpers. Whenever any fresh temptation arises, you find strength in their warning and counsel. This is a very great privilege. I wish that in all churches we would practice the text, “Encourage him,” more and more. We ought to comfort the feeble-minded and support the weak.

But dear friends, beware of the piety which depends upon encouragement. You will have to go, perhaps, where you will be frowned at and scowled at, where the head of the household, instead of encouraging prayer, will refuse you either the room or the time for engaging in it. You may meet with hard words, bitter sneers, and cruel mockings, because you profess to be a Christian. Oh! get grace which will stand that fiery trial. God give you a grace that will be independent of human helpers, because it hangs upon the bare arm of God Himself.

Some, too, we know, whose religion is sustained by *example*. It may be the custom in the circle in which you move to attend a place of worship. Nay, more, it has come to be the fashion to join the church and make a profession of religion. Well, example is a good thing. When I was crossing the Humber from Hull to New Holland the other day, a steamer came in with sheep on board, and there was some difficulty in getting them from the boat to the pier. The butcher first dragged one sheep over the drawbridge, and then the others came along readily enough.

Example is a good thing—one true sheep of Christ may lead the rest in the way of truth and obedience, but a religion which depends entirely on other people must obviously go to ruin when subjected to the temptation of an evil example. Why, if you simply join the church because other young people do it, or profess such-and-such a faith because it happens to be the prevailing doctrine in the district where you reside—why, then, your religion will depend on the locality, and when you move somewhere else, your religion will move off too, or you from it.

Young man, avoid this feeble sort of piety. Be a man who can be singular when to be singular is to be right. If the whole world shall run headlong down the broad road, be it yours to thread your way through the crowd against the current along the uphill way of life. The dead fish floats down the stream, the live fish goes against it. Show your life by shunning unholy example.

Furthermore, a hypocrite’s religion is often very much supported by the *profit* that he makes by it. Mr. By-ends joined the church because, he said, he should get a good wife by making a profession of religion. Besides, Mr. By-ends kept a shop, and went to a place of worship, because he said the people would have to buy goods somewhere, and if they saw him at their place very likely they would come to his shop, and so his religion would help his trade. Thus he argued that there were three good things—a profession of religion, a good wife, and a good trade as well.

Suppose, Mr. By-ends, that your religion involved your missing the supposed good wife, and losing the good customers, what about it then? “Why, then,” says he, “I’m very sorry, but really we must look to the main chance. We must not commit ourselves too far.” That is Mr. By-ends’ way of judging. He does not look upon the things of God as the main chance, they are means to an end—that is all.

I fear there is much of this everywhere. You will know best, any of you, how far you are affected by it. I am sure there are few, if any of you, who can be suspected of coming here to gain trade, for the thing does not answer in such a city as London, but in country towns this operates marvelously. You can have the dissenting trade if you go to meeting, or you can have the church trade if you go to the steeple-house.

Well, worshippers of the golden calf, do you know what Christ will do with you if you are found in His temple when He comes? That scourge of small cords will be on your backs. "Take these things from here," He will say, as He sees your tables, and your doves, and your shekels. "My Father's house shall be called a house of prayer, you have made it a den of thieves." The rush will grow where there is plenty of mire, plenty of profit for religion, but dry up the gains, and where would some people's religion be? Pray with all your might against this loathsome disgusting sin of making a pretension to godliness merely for the sake of getting something by it. Yet, doubtless, there are crowds who do this.

With certain persons their godliness rests very much upon their *prosperity*. "Does Job serve God for nought?" was the wicked question of Satan concerning that upright man, but of many it might be asked with justice, for they love God after a fashion because He prospers them, but if things went ill with them, they would give up all faith in God.

I remember two who joined this church. I remember them with sorrow. I faintly hope good things of them, but I frequently fear the worst. They joined this church when things were going very well, but almost from that very time, they had a succession of losses, and they imputed this to their having made a profession of religion, and so they gave up outward religious duties. Whether they did that out of a scrupulous honesty, I scarcely can tell, or whether it really was this—that they could not receive evil at the hand of God as well as good—I do not know. I am inclined to fear it was the latter.

There are some who quarrel with the most High. If they can clearly see that, since the time of their supposed conversion, the world has gone prosperously with them, then they will love God in their poor carnal way. But if it has been nothing but adversity, then they are astonished, and think God is not kind with them. Do you know that the promise of the old covenant was prosperity, but the promise of the new covenant is adversity? Listen to this text—"Every branch in me that bears not fruit he takes away, and every branch that bears fruit"—what! "he purges it, that it may bring forth more fruit." If you bring forth fruit, you will have to endure affliction. "Alas!" says one, "that is a terrible prospect." Ah! but beloved, this affliction works out such comfortable fruit that the Christian, who is the subject of it, has learned to rejoice in tribulations, because as his tribulations abound so abound his consolation by Christ Jesus.

Rest assured, if you are a godly man, you will be no stranger to the rod. Trials must and will befall. But do not let me mislead anybody into the idea of praying for trouble. I have heard of one who did so—he only did it but once—many trials made him wiser. The true-born child knows how to bear the rod, but he will not ask for it—if he asked for it, he would be very silly, and it would be of no service to him. You will have it sooner or later, and though, it may be, months and years will roll very quietly with you, yet there will be days of darkness, and you ought to rejoice that there are such, for in these you will be weaned from earth and made ready for heaven. You will be delivered from your clingings to the present, and made to long, and pine, and sigh for the things which are not seen but eternal, so soon to be revealed to you.

To conclude this point. The hypocrite is very much affected by the *respectability* of the religion which he avows. John Bunyan's pithy way of putting it is, "Many walk with religion when she wears her silver slippers," but they forsake her if she goes barefoot. May I ask you this question? What would you do if to follow Christ were penal according to the laws of the land? If you had to live under perpetual jeopardy of life for reading the Word, would you hide it as the saints of God did, behind the wainscot or under the floor, and read it down in the cellar or up in the attic at spare moments?

Could you come forward in the day of trial, as those did in Pliny's time, and say, "I am a Christian"? Do you think that like poor Tomkins, when Bonner held his finger over the candle to let him see what it was like, you could still say you could burn, but you could not turn? Could you stand as some of the martyrs did at the stake, telling those who looked on that if they did not clap their hands at the last they might know their religion was not true, and so at the very last, when their poor fingers were all on fire, they would still lift them up, and wave their hands to and fro, and cry out, "None but Christ! None but Christ!"

Do you think you would have the grace to suffer for Christ Jesus? You may say, "I fear I should not." My dear friends, that fear is a very natural one, but mark you, if you can bear the ordinary trials of the day, the constant trials of the world, and take them before God and exhibit Christian patience under them, you may *hope* that as a believer in Christ you would have more grace given you when the trials became more severe, and so you would be able to pass through them as the saints did of old.

But mark you, if the present trials and troubles of the day are too much for you, and you cannot exhibit Christian patience under them, I am compelled to ask you in the language of Jeremiah, "If you have run with the footmen and they have wearied you, how will you contend with horses? and if in the land of peace wherein you trusted, they wearied you, then how will you do in the swelling of Jordan?" This may help us to try ourselves.

III. We have a third point to close with, and that is, WHAT BECOMES OF THE HYPOCRITE'S HOPE?

"While it is yet in its greenness, and not cut down, it withers before any other herb. So are the paths of all that forget God; and the hypocrite's hope shall perish." Long before the Lord comes to cut the hypocrite down, it often happens that *he dries up for want of the mire on which he lives*. The excitement, the encouragement, the example, the profit, the respectability, the prosperity, upon which he lived fail him, and he fails too. Alas, how dolefully is this the case in all Christian churches!

Little have we had to mourn over defections during the years of our ministry, but we have had some sorrowful, very sorrowful cases, and I doubt not we shall have more. "Lord, is it I?" "Lord, is it I?" is a question that may be passed round among professing Christians now. I fear that there are those here this morning who one day will deny the Lord who bought them, and crucify the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame.

"Oh!" says one, "it cannot be me." Do not be too sure, friend, do not be too sure! If I could come in prophetic spirit to some of you who *will* do this, and look you in the face, and tell you what you will do, you would say like Hazael, "Is your servant a dog that he should do this thing?" And I should have to settle my countenance until I became ashamed, and look at you yet again, and say, "You are no dog, and yet you will play the dog, and return to your vomit, and become yet again what once you were, only with this aggravation, that you will have sinned against light and against knowledge, against sacred influences, and professed enjoyments of divine love."

You have cleansed the house, you have swept it, you have garnished it, and the evil spirit is gone, but if the Holy Spirit has not driven him out, if this has not been a work of power on the part of God, that evil spirit will come back, and he will take unto himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they shall enter in and dwell there, and your last end will be worse than the first. Better not to have known the way of righteousness than, having known it, to be turned back again.

The worst of men are those traitors who leave the army of truth to side with the foe. I believe in the doctrine of the final perseverance of every true child of God—but there are in all our churches certain spurious pretenders who will not hold on their way, who will blaze and sparkle for a season, and then they will go out in darkness. They are "wandering stars, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever." Better far make no pretension of having come to Christ, and of having been born-again, unless through divine grace you shall hold fast to the end.

Remember the back door to hell! Remember the back door to hell! There is a public entrance for the open sinner, but there is a back door for the professed saint. There is a back door for the hoary-headed professor who has lived many years in apparent sincerity, but who has been a liar before God. There is a back door for the preacher who can talk fast and loudly, but who does not in his own heart know the truth he is preaching. There is a back door to hell for church members who are amiable and excellent in many respects, but who have not really looked unto the Lord Jesus Christ and found true salvation in Him. God grant that this may wake some, who otherwise would sleep themselves into perdition.

Yet again, where the rush still continues green, because it has marsh and water enough on which to feed, another result happens, namely, that *ere long the sickle is used to cut it down*. So must it be with

you, professor, if you shall keep up a green profession all your days. Yet if you are heartless, spongy, soft, yielding, unfruitful, like the rush, you will be cut down and sorrowful will be the day when, with a blaze, you shall be consumed. Oh! to be cut down at the last.

Death, I hope, beloved, will be to many of you the season of your greatest joy. You will climb to Pisgah's top with weary footsteps, but when once there, the vision of the landscape will make amends for all the toil. The brooks, and hills, and vales, with milk and honey flow, and your delighted eyes shall gaze upon your portion, your eternal heritage.

But oh! how different will be our lot, if instead of this, "Tekel" shall be written upon us at the last, because we are found wanting. "O my God! My God! Have You forsaken me? Am I, after all, mistaken? Have I played the hypocrite, and must I take the mask off now? Have I covered over the cancer? Have I worn a golden cloth over my leprous forehead, and must it be rent away? And must I stand, the mock of devils, and the laughter of all worlds? What! Have I drunk of Your cup? Have I eaten with You in the streets, and must I hear You say, 'I never knew you, depart from me you worker of iniquity'? Oh, must it be!"

Then how hard will be the bed on which I die! How stuffed with thorns that pillow! How tortured and anguished my poor broken heart, when every prop is knocked away, and the house comes tumbling down about my ears, when every drop of comfort is dried up, and even here the thirsty spirit lacks a drop of cordial to afford it comfort!

O my dear hearers, by the eternal God I do conjure you, seek a genuine religion. Do not put off self-examination. I dare not put it off on my own account, and I pray you do not postpone it on yours. If I have not said a word to comfort and to cheer you this morning, forgive that lack of service, for my aim is to drive at this one thing—it will in the end be the best and most comforting to you all, if you will set to work now, and with diligence try yourselves, whether you be in the faith.

Cry to God to aid you in this, you cannot do it well yourself, for, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?" O cry to Him—"Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me and know my ways." Time is flying—set about the business ere it is gone. Death is coming on—search yourselves before the darkness thickens into midnight gloom. The judgment day will soon arrive, the King will sit upon the great white throne. Oh! before *He* judges you, judge yourselves, that you be not judged.

The division will soon take place between the goats and the sheep. O, seek to be under Christ the heavenly Shepherd now, that you be not banished from His presence at the last. What more can I say? It is not your body that is at stake—it is not your estates that are in jeopardy—your souls, your undying souls, destined to heaven's glories or to hell's miseries are now in question. Search yourselves, search yourselves, and God Almighty search you too.

Ah! there are some of you who have no need to search. Without any trial you know yourselves to be on the wrong side, and there are others of you who, when you have searched, will still be afraid that you are wrong. Ah! well, whatever we are, or may have been, remember Jesus came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." Looking to that thorn-crowned head, those dear hands and feet nailed to the tree, that blessed heart all exposed by the soldier's spear—looking there, looking there only, looking there now, we find salvation.

Believers, you have looked before, but if that is a matter of question, look now. "Look unto me and be you saved, all you ends of the earth." Repeat that glance which gave you comfort. There is life still in a look at that crucified One, there is life at this moment for you. Jesu! Your people look to You again. Thou Lover of our souls! accept us!

Oh, you who never looked before, He reigns in glory, mighty to save. Repentance and remission of sins He gives. Only do but trust Him with your souls. Have done with all your works, your willings, your prayers, your tears, your everything as a ground of confidence, and trust in Him who died for

sinners, and you “shall never perish, neither shall any pluck you out of his hands.” The Lord grant we may be found right at last, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

Portion Of Scripture Read Before Sermon—Psalm 139

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.